

SERVING CONTENT-TARGETED ADS IN E-MAIL, SUCH AS E-MAIL NEWSLETTERS

§ 0. RELATED APPLICATION

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This application claims benefit to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/509,164, ^{now expired,} titled "SERVING CONTENT-TARGETED ADS IN E-MAIL, SUCH AS E-MAIL NEWSLETTERS," filed on October 7, 2003, and listing Alexander Paul Carobus, Alex Roetter, and Ben Davenport as the inventors. That application is expressly incorporated herein by reference. The scope of the present invention is not limited to any requirements of the specific embodiments in that application.

§ 1. BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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§ 1.1 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention concerns advertising. In particular, the present invention concerns expanding the opportunities for advertisers to target their ads.

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§ 1.2 RELATED ART

Interactive advertising provides opportunities for advertisers to target their ads to a receptive audience. That is, targeted ads are more likely to be useful to end users since the ads may be relevant to a need inferred from some user activity (e.g., relevant to a user's search query to a search engine, relevant to content in a document requested by the user, etc.) Query keyword relevant advertising has been used by search engines, such as the AdWords advertising system by Google of Mountain View, CA. Similarly, content-relevant advertising systems have been proposed. For example, U.S. Patent Application Serial Numbers 10/314,427 (incorporated herein by reference and referred to as "the '427 application") titled "METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR SERVING

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RELEVANT ADVERTISEMENTS", filed on December 6, 2002 and listing Jeffrey A. Dean, Georges R. Harik and Paul Bucheit as inventors, and 10/375,900, *now patent no. 7136875*, (incorporated by reference and referred to as "the '900 application") titled "SERVING ADVERTISEMENTS BASED ON CONTENT," filed on February 26,

5 2003 and listing Darrell Anderson, Paul Bucheit, Alex Carobus, Claire Cui, Jeffrey A. Dean, Georges R. Harik, Deepak Jindal and Narayanan Shivakumar as inventors, describe methods and apparatus for serving ads relevant to the content of a document, such as a Web page for example. Some embodiments of the '900 application use embedded information and/or instructions, such as
10 IFRAMEs or JavaScript for example, to insert ads into documents that are difficult to analyze (e.g., crawl and cache) in advance, such as dynamically generated Web pages, Web pages that are changed or updated often, etc.

Serving content-targeted ads in e-mail newsletters is a potential source of a large number of additional quality page-views for advertisers. As shown in
15 Figure 1, in a networked environment 100, a publisher 110 can publish a document 115, such as an e-mail newsletter, and distribute it to client devices 120/130 of end users. An instance of the document 124/134 may be read by an e-mail reader 122 (e.g., Outlook from Microsoft Corporation, etc.) residing on a client device 120, and/or by a browser 132 (e.g., Internet Explorer, Netscape,
20 Opera, etc.) residing on a client device 130 and accessing a Web-based e-mail server 140, also referred to as a proxy e-mail client (e.g., Hotmail, YahooMail, etc.). A content-relevant ad server 150, such as those described in the '427 and '900 applications, may be used to serve ads relevant to content found in documents such as e-mails. The facilities and/or components described may
25 communicate with one another via one or more networks 160, such as the Internet for example. The content-relevant ad server 150 may include ad information 155 which is used to target the ads to particular concepts or topics. As shown in Figure 2, a set 280 of one or more ads 285 may be inserted into the documents, such as e-mail newsletters.

The Sprinks service offered by "About" of New York, NY allows advertisers to insert ads targeted to topics from a predetermined lists in e-mail using dynamically generated images with client-side image maps and cookies.

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5 U.S. Patent application Serial Number 10/452,830 (incorporated herein by reference and referred to as "the '830 application")^{now pending} titled "SERVING ADVERTISEMENTS USING INFORMATION ASSOCIATED WITH E-MAIL", filed on June 2, 2003 and listing Jeffrey A. Dean, Georges R. Harik and Paul Bucheit as inventors describes methods and apparatus for serving ads relevant to information in e-mail documents. The '830 application describes many

10 alternative ways of serving ads with e-mail, including using applications on a sender client device, a recipient client device, a Web-based e-mail server, etc. In any event, the ads are targeted to relevance information (e.g., concepts, topics, etc.) that may be extracted from the content of (or other information derivable from) the e-mail.

15 Regardless of the system used to serve ads with e-mail, such as e-mail newsletters, it may be desirable to (i) obtain e-mail content information so that useful, content-relevant, ads may be served, and (ii) provide ads in a format that can be rendered on and supported by a wide variety of e-mail clients/readers, or at least prevalent e-mail clients/readers. This may be challenging since many, if

20 not most, of the more popular Web-based e-mail clients strip out IFRAMEs and JavaScript. This may preclude some of the methods and apparatus described in the '900 application from being used to serve dynamic HTML ads.

Although some ad serving systems have a billing scheme based on the number of impressions, advertisers often want to be billed for served ads only

25 when such ads produce a desired outcome. For example, advertisers may want to be billed per ad selection, or per conversion, or based on some other measurable notion of ad performance, rather than per impression. Moreover, some ad serving systems, such as Google AdWords, may use some performance parameter of ads in determining whether and/or how to serve ads.

30 This allows such ad serving systems to serve more useful ads, or to serve more

each publisher may have a GUID defined per newsletter issue and the cookie may be set on the domain googleimageads.com. This may be used to ensure that no google.com cookies are received on a click request, which may be used to enforce a policy of not linking content-ad clicks to google.com cookies. A domain (googleleadsservices.com) which allows cookies on content-relevant ads may be used for conversion tracking. However, it may be difficult to reuse this domain because some browsers impose a cookie limit (e.g., of 30 cookies) per domain, and reusing the domain might unnecessarily reduce either service's cookie limit.

10 In one embodiment of the present invention, since the image URL is fixed, and cannot contain a "random=" parameter that is set at view time, the (e.g., front end of the) content-relevant ad server may set all possible headers to keep the browser from caching the image.

The exemplary cookie scheme described above works with the Hotmail and Yahoo Mail Web-based mail servers, using the Internet Explorer and Mozilla browsers. If a P3P header acceptable to Internet Explorer is set, it also works in Outlook, and Outlook Express. Taken together, this covers a large percentage of existing e-mail clients in terms of number of users. Even if the foregoing exemplary cookie scheme does not work with some e-mail clients, such as clients with cookies turned off, it should not otherwise adversely affect the recipient of the newsletter.

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Other schemes for determining user actions, such as those described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/653,899, ^{now pending} (incorporated herein by reference) titled "SYSTEMS AND METHOD FOR DETERMINING USER ACTIONS," filed on September 4, 2003, and listing Alex Roetter and Deepak Jindal as inventors (Attorney Docket No. 0026-0040) may be used instead of, or in addition to, the techniques described above.